

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 16, 2006

**A Very Important Corner:** No. 1 Fibre Mill, the construction of which was described in the *Weekly News* of November 28, 2005, was completed in 1904. Being parallel to and close by the railroad directly across the tracks from the Yorklyn passenger and freight station now at Greenbank, it had one small corner on the first floor that in some ways was the most important room in Yorklyn for about 60 years. This room was on the track side at the end of the building nearest the public/private road connecting Yorklyn Road, near the bridge with the new fibre mills and the mill residences on the hill to the southeast, including the home of J. Warren Marshall and finally the Yorklyn Gun Club at the very top.

When "No. 1" was new, the office of the National Fibre and Insulation Company was contained in this room. A telephone was installed, possibly being the second phone in Yorklyn (the Garrett Snuff Mills had the first). J. Homer Kratz was hired as office manager, bookkeeper, and possibly paymaster and had his desk in this room. We know there was a typewriter, but we don't know whether Homer operated it or whether he had a secretary. As the company grew and the staff was expanded, this room was outgrown, and a new office building was built before 1920 on the same side of the tracks across the private road. This building served as the main office of the same company with a new name (National Vulcanized Fibre Co.) until the office was moved to Beech Street in Wilmington, with Warren Marshall and his top managers going to the new urban location, probably in the late 1920s. Homer Kratz went to Wilmington as well, but there were plenty of plant managers needing office space at Yorklyn, so they continued to fill the larger office building near the tracks.

In the 1920s, Samuel S. Dennison became paymaster and used the tiny office in No. 1 Fibre Mill for his important purpose. Since Republican administrations occupied the White House in those days, Sam was appointed postmaster at Yorklyn, replacing Grover C. Gregg Sr. The Post Office was moved from Gregg's store to this famous little room, and tiny P.O. boxes covered one partition wall. This is where I first remember picking up our mail, twice a day, but only once on Saturday. It was also a social location for the gathering of local news. When Franklin D. Roosevelt became president, Philip E. Touhey, in line to become superintendent of the Snuff Mill, became Yorklyn's postmaster, and the Post Office was moved again, this time to a tiny, ornate brick building next to the snuff mills, which had been the paymaster's shack for the snuff employees. (The Post Office remained in this tiny building until Grover C. Gregg Jr., appointed by Harry Truman, moved it to Gregg's store again, and it remains in the same building today.)

The tiny room in "No. 1" was not yet abandoned to the public. As freight traffic dwindled on the B & O's Landenberg Branch in the early 1960s, the railroad found it too costly to maintain the old frame station built in 1872, and the local agent, John Eskridge, rented the little corner room for B & O's presence on the Landenberg Branch, as all other stations and agents were gone. From this little room, and later from an even smaller room on the second floor of the building, Eskridge handled the bills of lading for all shippers on the "Branch," as well as a small amount of Railway Express Agency business. When all recordkeeping was closed out about 1970 and freight billings were handled from afar, NVF no longer had to allow access to this location as a public road.